



Department of Energy

Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, Oregon 97208-3621

ENVIRONMENT, FISH AND WILDLIFE

April 30, 2003

In reply refer to: KEC-4

To: People Interested in the South Fork Flathead Watershed/Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Project

Proposal

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) has initiated a plan to remove the hybrid trout from approximately 21 lakes in the South Fork Flathead drainage and replace them with native westslope cutthroat trout. Eleven of these lakes are located in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, 8 are in the Jewel Basin Hiking Area, and 2 are in the Flathead National Forest outside these areas. MFWP, along with the U.S Forest Service, Flathead National Forest (USFS), and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), is proposing to remove these hybrid trout using fish toxin. BPA funds would be used to implement this project. These activities would occur on lands administered by USFS. The hybrid trout threaten continued and expanded hybridization with genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout in the South Fork Flathead River drainage. The South Fork currently has the largest genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout in the world.

Because the lakes are located in remote mountainous terrain, a combination of aircraft and livestock is being proposed to transport materials, equipment, and personnel to each site. The use of livestock is proposed to access all wilderness lakes that have trails to them. Only two wilderness lakes have no access trails so a helicopter is proposed for transporting materials to these sites. The use of helicopters and airplanes is proposed to transport materials to some lakes outside the wilderness. Motorized rafts would be used for applying the fish toxin. These lakes would be treated at the rate of 2 or 3 per year over about a 10-year period.

The mission of MFWP is to provide angling opportunities for the public and to protect sensitive species from becoming extinct. Additionally, MFWP is responsible for the fisheries management of lakes in the Flathead National Forest and has been stocking lakes in the South Fork since 1926. Thus, MFWP will continue to manage the lakes and provide angling opportunities. MFWP plans to restock the lakes with genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout after the hybrid fish have been removed. The restocking of the lakes is being funded by MFWP and not by BPA, and therefore is not part of the proposed action in this project.

As Federal agencies, BPA and USFS must study the environmental impacts, both adverse and beneficial, of a proposed project before it can proceed. An initial decision was made to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA). After considering the complexities of the environmental issues presented by this project, the project team decided that a more detailed analysis is required than would normally be required for an EA. Therefore, we have determined that the potential

effects of the proposed action and appropriate level of environmental analysis would warrant preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). BPA will be the lead agency and USFS and MFWP will be cooperating agencies for the EIS.

Public Scoping Meeting - Open House

The agencies are requesting your comments and suggestions in defining the issues to be covered in the Draft EIS that is being developed. BPA, USFS, and MFWP will provide information about the proposed project and be available to answer questions between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 22, 2003, in an open house forum. Participants may also submit written comments during the meeting.

Public Scoping Meeting Open House
Thursday, May 22, 4-8 p.m.
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Headquarters
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, Montana

How to Comment

BPA invites comments and suggestions on the proposed action. Send written comment letters and requests to be placed on the project mailing list to Communications, Bonneville Power Administration - DM-7, P.O. Box 12999, Portland, Oregon, 97212. Comments may also be sent to the BPA Internet address: comment@bpa.gov. **Comments will be accepted until June 23, 2003.** Please reference the Montana Trout Conservation Project.

Project Schedule

We plan to have a Draft EIS ready for public review in the winter of 2003-2004.

For More Information

In the meantime if you have questions, call me toll-free at 1-800-282-3713 or at my direct number 503-230-5756, or send me an e-mail at caspierring@bpa.gov. Enclosed is additional information about this project, including maps. Also, this information is available on the BPA website: <http://www.efw.bpa.gov/cgi-bin/efw/E/Welcome.cgi>. Click on the link to South Fork Flathead Watershed/Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Project.

Thank you for your interest.

/s/ Colleen Spiering

Colleen Spiering
 Environmental Project Manager

4 Enclosures:

Information Brief: Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Project (including table)

Question and Answer Sheet

Public Comment Form

Maps